

lajuddin not making

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Following the meeting, Hasina briefed journalists about the current political situation, the 11-point task proposed to the CG by the 14-party coalition, and the demand for re-constitution of the Election Commission (EC).

Saying that lajuddin is unable to perform the duties of two posts and could not make the CG effective and functional even after 10 days of forming the interim government, Hasina urged him to appoint a new person as the CA in line with the constitution for smoothing the functioning of the interim administration.

She also alleged that the president cum CA has made his situation more complex by taking charge of 14 important ministries and divisions. "We have shown tolerance and given the president cum chief adviser time to prove his neutrality, but he failed," Hasina added.

The AL president also came down heavily on Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Justice MA Aziz. Hasina alleged that the appointment of Aziz as CEC has been controversial as a case was filed against the appointment in the High Court.

Hasina categorically stressed the need for reconstituting the EC saying that a free and fair election is not possible under the current EC led by CEC MA Aziz. Different international organisations as well as the council of advisers to the CG also stressed the need for re-constitution of the EC, Hasina mentioned.

Termining Aziz 'mentally sick and shameless', Hasina accused him of pushing the country towards a confrontation only to help one party's design to rig the next election.

She asked Aziz to quit the post showing respect to the people's demand just like the way two former CECs Justice Sadeq and Justice Sultan Hossain Khan resigned in the face of the people's demand.

Drawing attention of the President, the AL president said the country will head towards a confrontation and bloodshed, if the CG tries to hold any election keeping Aziz in the office of the CEC.

Urging the president to reconstitute the EC in order to hold a free and fair election, she warned lajuddin and those who are 'controlling him from behind' that they will be liable for any 'bloodshed' following the CG's failure to meet the 11-point charter of demands by the November 12 deadline.

Hasina, a former prime minister, said although they extended the ultimatum by a week from the first deadline of November 3 on the request of the two advisors sent to her by the president, they have seen nothing that reflects the CA's neutrality. The CA did not take any action to meet the demands, Hasina said.

If the demands are not met by the new deadline, she said, all roads, rail and waterways, ports, and every other means of communication will be shut down from November 12 until a congenial atmosphere is created for a free and fair election.

"We don't want violence, we want free and fair elections in a peaceful atmosphere. But the president cum chief adviser has not yet proven his neutrality through any of his actions. Time is running out fast and there are only four days in hands, we have not witnessed any activity from which we can ascertain his (CA) neutrality. Rather, the president is wasting time," Hasina said.

Khaleda accuses

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and supporters of the immediate past ruling parties joined the rally. In her speech, Khaleda noted that when the constitution requires the advisers to be neutral and non-partisan, some of them took the oath, hiding their political affiliation.

They did not carry out their duties neutrally in the last 10 days. They in fact have failed to live up to their constitutional obligations, she added.

"Two advisers have visited a political leader's house without maintaining the protocol and in a car without flag. Such meeting is absolutely unconstitutional," she observed.

"The only duty of the advisers is to help the Election Commission but they don't seem willing at all to do this," she alleged.

Some of them talk to the media in a freestyle manner that is unconstitutional, Khaleda said.

"You alone will have to bear the responsibility if the election is not held in a free and fair manner and the people won't spare you," she warned the advisers.

"It's not their duty to fulfil any political party's agenda but some of them [advisers] are trying to do precisely the same," she said.

"One or two advisers are actively working for a political party. And it's our observation from what we have seen over the last 10 days," she said calling on the advisers to refrain from those practices.

The former premier then asked the interim administration to help the EC so that it could announce the election schedule shortly.

Criticising Awami League (AL) for 'creating anarchy', she said the people will give a befitting reply to the recent killings committed by the Awamis. "They will be pun-

ished for the horrific deeds in the people's court," she said.

Khaleda said the public will never stand anyone attempting to foil the election.

She said that they [opposition] did everything they could to prove the alliance government a failure but to no avail.

"We did not hand over power on October 28 due to the conspiracy of Awami League. Still, the caretaker government took the charge constitutionally.

"The president's taking over as the interim government chief was very much in line with the constitution as he did not find anyone fit for the post," argued the BNP chairperson.

City BNP President and Dhaka City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka presided over the rally addressed among others by Jamaat Amir Motiur Rahman Nizami, Islami Oikya Jote leader Fazlul Haque Aminee, Chairmen of Bangladesh Jatiya Party factions Nazirul Rahman Manzur and MA Matin, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, Moudud Ahmad, Saifur Rahman, KM Obaidur Rahman, Khandaker Mahbubuddin Ahmad, Barkat Ullah Bulu, and Aman Ullah Aman.

NEXT PROGRAMMES
The BNP and its allies will hold rallies and stage demonstrations at ward and union levels across the country on November 9 and 10 in protest at what they said was the violence by the 14-party combine.

BNP chief Khaleda Zia announced the programmes at yesterday's public rally.

Ortega on brink

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almost 8 points ahead of his conservative, pro-US rival, Eduardo Montealegre.

The leftist, who led a 1979 popular revolution and then fought U.S.-trained and financed Contra rebels in a devastating civil war throughout the 1980s, needs to win at least 35 percent and hold a lead of 5 points to take victory in the first round and avoid a dangerous runoff.

His expected return to power 16 years after losing a 1990 election near the end of the Contra war is a setback for Washington and a boost for Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, who is trying to build a Latin American alliance of anti-US leaders.

Ortega, 60, has dropped his Marxism of the Cold War era and now speaks mainly of God, peace and reconciliation.

He stopped short of claiming victory on Monday night but said that, whoever won, he was ready to work with other parties to "eradicate poverty and reassure the private sector and international investors".

He promises to work with business leaders and has backed a trade deal with the United States, but US officials still do not trust him and worry about his friendship with Chavez.

Venezuela's leader helped Ortega's election campaign by sending cheap fertilizer and fuel to Sandinista-led groups. Many expect Chavez to spend some of his country's petrodollars to finance social programs in Nicaragua, which trails only Haiti as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

"Venezuela's cooperation is the best. With help, the Nicaraguan people can get ahead," said Carlos Espinoza, a young Sandinista, at celebrations in the capital Managua.

Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage said Ortega's victory was a "resounding defeat" for the United States.

Still, Ortega knows well the cost of confrontation with Washington. Some 30,000 people were killed in the Contra war and a U.S. economic embargo caused chaos, helping to wreck the Sandinistas' ambitious education and health programs.

Combined with his Marxist government's mismanagement and heavy-handed repression of dissent, the U.S. campaign finally put Ortega out of power when voters elected the first of three straight Washington-backed presidents in 1990.

U.S. officials recently warned of a cut in investment and aid to Nicaragua if Ortega returned to power in this election, his third comeback attempt.

Voters apparently ignored the warnings, although Ortega was also helped by divisions in the right, which had in previous elections united behind a single candidate to keep Ortega out.

Ctg mayor

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toward a political party, BNP. Such action by him is in fact a violation of the oath he took as the chief of the interim government," alleged Mohiuddin, also the coordinator of Chittagong divisional 14-party alliance, while speaking at the Central Shaheed Minar.

The mayor said the president has so far failed miserably to make an impression of his neutrality.

He alleged that a certain vested quarter was attempting in vain to spoil the democratic movement of the people by dragging the army into controversy.

City AL Vice President Belayet Hossain and Gono Forum leader M Kafiluddin also spoke in the gathering.

Israel

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the Shia militia.

"We will not give Hezbollah the opportunity to come back to these positions," he said, gesturing to Lebanese territory across the border.

"We will do everything now to prevent Hezbollah from coming back and sitting on the border."

The liberal Haaretz daily on Monday wrote that according to military assessments, Hezbollah and Syria "are likely to start a war against Israel next summer" and "all preparations are being made to ensure maximum preparedness."

Israel and the Shia militia fought a 34-day war that ended with a UN-brokered truce on August 14.

Following the ceasefire, several top Israeli officials have said the Jewish state must prepare for a second round of hostilities with the militia, which it says is armed by Syria and Iran. Both Damascus and Tehran deny the charges.

Curbing price hike

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Bureau of Statistics (BBS), during the month of August the average inflation rate was 6.99 percent, which was 7.09 percent in July, while on a point-to-point basis, the inflation rate was 6.67 in August and 6.77 percent in July.

While the BBS report shows that the inflation rate is on the decline these days, in practice, prices of essentials in the kitchen market rose tremendously during the month of Ramadan.

No cut-off time

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"This is unacceptable that a ship would waste time at the jetty when dozens of vessels wait at the outer anchorage in pursuit of a berthing permission," said a source.

Suggesting a cut off time for the ships, he said the vessels should not be allowed to stay at the jetty for more than 24 hours after off-loading import items.

The ships belonging to the Chittagong Feeder Trade Committee (CFTC) are mainly involved with such practices, and in connivance with the main line operators (MLOs), they remain at the jetty until loading 70-80 per cent of a ship's capacity, he said.

There are allegations that they bribe the port officials for staying longer at the jetty, and a section of shipping agents are involved in the practice.

Swapam Ghosh, convener of CFTC, however, said, "No ship spends additional time at the jetty for export cargo. The delay may be due to other reasons but not for loading return cargo."

Swapam said the ships spend long time at the jetty because most of the ships have to sit idle for two or three days before starting discharge of import goods mainly due to lack of adequate handling equipment.

Despite much worsening of the congestion at the port, the CFTC is yet to take any decision regarding imposition of fresh surcharge on Chittagong-bound cargo, he said.

Inefficiency of the port authorities

Nagorik Committee

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through the proposed amendments to the RPO, he pointed out.

Joint convener of the committee also former finance minister M Syeduzzaman presented the recommendations and other members of the committee responded to various queries of the journalists.

Responding to the journalists the committee members observed that the present chief election commissioner should feel 'embarrassed' and save the nation from possible confrontations.

Members of the committee Abdullah Abu Sayeed, Laila Kabir, Major (retd) Moynul Hossain, Abul Ahsan, Syed Monzur Elahi, Prof Anisuzzaman, M Mujibul Haque and Prof Mahmuda Islam were present at the briefing and responded to newsmen's questions.

The recommendations said the election commission should appoint an auditor from the Comptroller and Auditor General's Office to examine the information provided by the candidates about their assets and liabilities.

The election commission should form a 'disqualification commission' comprising district judges or retired judges for cancelling any candidature when necessary. Election related cases must be resolved within six months of filing. The high court should not adjourn the hearings more than three times, the recommendations added.

The committee also recommended bringing some amendments to the Conduct of Election Rule 1972 for making the Representations of the People Order 1972 fruitfully applicable. In related proposals the committee asked to include disclosure of information regarding candidates' lifestyles and information about whether they whitened black money and if they are loan or bill defaulters.

EC may get

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reforms as there is an uncertainty over the present commission's continuation," a senior official at the EC Secretariat told The Daily Star.

Directed by the EC, the officials were working on reform proposals that include increasing election expenditure of a candidate to Tk 10 lakh from existing Tk 5 lakh, reviving the power to cancel candidature for gross irregularities in polls, and increasing the punishment for violating codes of conduct.

But now many political observers and senior EC Secretariat officials said there will be no major electoral reforms before the election due to time constraints.

"No proposals for bringing reforms in the electoral laws have been finalised yet," EC Secretary Abdur Rashid Sarkar told The Daily Star yesterday.

During the caretaker government in 2001, the then CEC MA Syed met the chief adviser soon after the caretaker chief assumed office and discussed a set of reform proposals. Syed earlier had dialogues with the major political parties also seeking their opinion about the proposals.

But CEC Aziz is yet to initiate any such step. Rather, the relation between the caretaker government and the EC has been deteriorating following the interim government's move to reconstitute the EC.

Adviser Akbar said people have a negative impression about the present EC. Even many donor agencies do not have trust in it. "So, we want to resolve the issue of making the EC effective and credible for holding a fair election," he said.

Referring to the suggestions made at a recent seminar organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Akbar said, "We will consider CPD's suggestions."

is responsible for the long congestion at the Chittagong port while the port has not been equipped and expanded properly to cope with the rapid growth of economic activities in the country, he said.

Around 14,000 loaded containers are now stockpiled at the port yard while 3,000 empty containers are lying idle there.

A section of businessmen use the port yard as godown and the customs authorities do not go for regular auction for clearing the imported goods left there for long, sources said, adding that many items including powder milk, medicine and oil that were imported in 2003, are still lying at the port yard.

The authorities' crash programme to ease the congestion has failed to improve the situation and the port management is in total chaos, said a shipping agent.

Besides, due to the slow activities at the inland container depot (ICD) at Kamalapur, a container takes 3035 days to be cleared at the ICD.

Meanwhile, a new ship that was earlier denied anchorage is expected to reach the outer anchorage on November 5, as the port authorities have given it the green signal to anchor and discharge goods for some 'unknown' reasons, said a source.

tered through providing some general information about themselves, and their political programmes and office addresses.

It said there should be a bar on participation by government officials in elections within three years of their retirements. The candidates should have to submit information about their incomes, expenditure, assets and liabilities to returning officers and a chart of that should be published for public display within 72 hours of submissions.

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US votes

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at 6 pm EST (2300 GMT), but it could be hours before results are known in many crucial races.

Bush cast his ballot in Crawford, Texas, joking that he had "pretty much" made up his mind.

After a five-day swing through 10 states to fire up supporters in Republican strongholds, he urged all Americans to vote no matter which side they backed.

"We live in a free society and our government is only as good as the willingness of our people to participate," Bush said. "Therefore no matter what your affiliation or if you don't have a party affiliation, do your duty, cast your ballot and let your voice be heard."

In Miami, retired Air Force Lt Col Armand Monaco, 86, said he cast his vote as much against Bush as for congressional candidates.

"I don't want anyone in there that might help W," the World War Two veteran said.

All 435 House seats, 33 Senate seats and 36 governorships are at stake and Democrats need to pick up 15 House seats and six Senate seats to seize control of both chambers of Congress.

About 50 contested House races and 10 Senate races are the chief battlegrounds. Independent analysts predict Democrats could gain 20 to 40 House seats, while polls show races for Republican-held Senate seats in Missouri, Virginia, Tennessee, Montana and Rhode Island are too close to call.

Democrats probably need to win four of those five Senate races to take control of the chamber.

Two national opinion polls on Monday showed Democrats still held a double-digit advantage when likely voters were asked which party's candidate they would support. The new polls contradicted two surveys released on Sunday that showed Republicans closing the gap on Democrats.

History was with Democrats — the party holding the White House traditionally loses seats in a president's sixth year.

The battle for the House will be fought largely in the East and Midwest, where scores of Republican incumbents are fighting for their political lives amid what polls show is a strong desire for change.

At least 35 Republican incumbents face strong challenges in Indiana and Connecticut, while four Republican-held seats in Pennsylvania and five New York seats could fall to Democrats.

In a campaign dominated by Iraq, Bush defended his handling of the war to the end and questioned what Democrats would do differently.

"We have a plan for victory. We've got a strategy to win. And part of that is to elect Republicans to the Congress and to the Senate," Bush told a rally in Bentonville, Arkansas on the eve of the election.

Bush, who has been hampered by low approval ratings and whose legacy could be on the line, said Republicans were coming back and would retain control of Congress on Tuesday.

"I knew we were going to finish strong. I knew that we were going to come roaring into Election Day, because we've got the right position on taxes and we've got the right position on what it takes to protect you from attack," he said.

Democrats put leaders like former President Bill Clinton, former Vice President Al Gore and Illinois Sen. Barack Obama on the campaign trail to drum up votes in the final hours.

7 cops

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traded gunshots and exploded bombs during the clash that lasted for two hours in front of the local BNP office and on Hospital Road.

They also swooped on police as they tried to bring the situation under control. The law enforcers fired 10 teargas shells to disperse the warning groups.

The injured were admitted to Nawabganj Hospital and different clinics in Dhaka.

CA failed

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Party sources said former state minister and Jatiya Party leader Syed Mohammad Kaisar, Sunamganj BNP leader Muktar Hossain Talukder, freedom fighter Nurul Islam Nur, and 5,000 BNP leaders and workers from Sunamganj and Hobiganj joined LDP yesterday.

B Chowdhury urged President lajuddin Ahmed to leave the portfolios, which are directly linked to the election. The portfolios like home, establishment and defence should be given to the advisers.

He said the election cannot be free, fair and neutral without reforming the Election Commission.

LDP Executive President Col (retd) Oli Ahmed said the chief adviser should prove his neutrality by bringing the corrupt ministers and MPs of the immediate past government to the dock.

"Thousands of evidence and witnesses will be available to prove their corruption... You just free yourself from the influence of BNP and act neutrally," Oli said, urging the president and chief adviser.

He said at least three secretaries having allegiance to BNP and now close aide to the chief adviser are exerting influence on him. The chief adviser has been acting on their suggestions, he added.

LDP General Secretary Major (retd) Abdul Mannan also spoke at the function.

Voter list printing

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experienced printers, attached with their tender bids, to select their favoured companies.

Nasir Uddin, manager of Nilima Printers, said he had submitted with his tender bid documents of his firm's experience but all those were missing when the tenders were sorted out.

"Some might have torn the papers to make some others qualify for the work," Nasir alleged, adding a top official of the EC Secretariat was involved in the misdeed.

Some companies alleged the EC did not consider inspection reports of its own teams in giving the work orders.

The EC did not follow properly its criteria for selection of the printing companies, an investigation by The Daily Star shows.

One EC team inspected all the 186 companies that took part in the tender bid for the job.

The inspection report shows 31 of the companies printed voter list in 2000, eight in 1995, five in 1995 and 2000, three worked on sub-contract and four printed supplementary voter list.

According to EC rules, more experienced companies like these were supposed to get work order or a lottery among the 51 should have been held to select the deserving ones, sources said.

But some EC Secretariat officials violated the rules and gave work order to their favoured companies, the sources alleged, giving the names of many of those.

One firm with date-expired trade licence and another which made gross mistakes in printing voter list in 2000 also got the job, they mentioned.

EC inspectors could not verify the existence of another printing firm that got the job since it did not have any address. Its owner, a government employee, was arrested for putting fake voters on the list in 2000.

The then EC secretary black-listed him and gave orders not to give any work to him or to his company in future.

When contacted last night, EC Secretary Abdur Rashid Sarkar said, "We formed an observation committee and gave the work orders on the basis of its report."

CG functioning

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As per the rules, all the officials concerned attended the meeting with the council of advisers.

The Cabinet Division urged all not to create any confusion regarding the matter.

Meanwhile, President and Chief Adviser lajuddin Ahmed yesterday approved six cabinet committees.

The committees are: Advisory Committee for Public procurement, Advisory Committee for Economic Affairs, Executive Committee for National Economic Council (Ecneec), National Economic Council (NEC), Advisory Council for Administrative Affairs and Advisory Committee for National Award.

Country dances

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here. If I can do something for the children and the development of football in the country, I'll feel very proud," said the 34-year-old on his arrival at the BFF (Bangladesh Football Federation) Bhaban in the afternoon.

Zidane arrived in Dhaka to open a new non-profit-making food plant run by Grameen Bank and French food giant Danone to provide cheap, nutritious food in Bogra.

Started to find an army of fans on his arrival at ZIA on the Monday night, the former France football captain began his day with a trip to Itahata village in Gazipur.

His notorious head butting of Italian defender Marco Materazzi during the 2006 World Cup final did no damage to his reputation among his Bangladeshi admirers. "I am glad to see your instant reception to me, and your happy faces really made me happy."

The three World Footballer-of-the-Year was surprised to find the way the poor females in the area used Grameen Bank's microcredit schemes to get rid of poverty.

Zidane was so moved by the activities of Grameen Bank that he expressed his desire to work in future to promote the innovative idea of microcredit and launch such bank in his native village in Algeria.

"A friendship has been built between us. This is Zidane's first visit but he will come here again in the future," said Grameen Bank founder and Nobel Peace Prize winner Prof Yunus.

He also hoped that the BFF (Bangladesh Football Federation) would take inspiration from Zidane's visit to develop the game in the country.

Replying to a question from a student of Itahata village, Zidane said his aim in life was to be a truck driver. But he was truly taken aback with the story of microcredit.

Jaeda Khatun, 45, described how she changed her life-style by investing small loan of Tk 3,000 about 16 years back. Now she owned land, cash deposit, and a fairly large poultry farm. Nasrin Begum (25), Sahinur Akther (50) also described similar stories

What can we do if someone takes the jobs in fake names."

He went on, "If any mistakes are found, we will make amendments. We will also take actions if anyone is found involved in corruption."

Saddam back to court for second trial

AFP, Baghdad